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Athelstone Uniting Church #198 (Last AUC sermon)

2 7 2023

Texts: Jeremiah 29:4-7 & Matthew 10: 40-42 (NIV)

Theme: "Bless – blessing for the common good"



Nina marni!

Our worship service this morning is brought to you by the word *Bless!*
And what a word to be able to focus on for my last service with you.

Earlier we sang *Blessed be your name*

We sang our praises - our blessings - to God, for the way God blesses us:

Blessed be Your name
In the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow
Blessed be Your name

This week I was reminded of these streams of abundance. I went for a morning walk to the first falls at Morialta. When I got to the first falls, I was rewarded with a glorious sight!

Let's take a look!

Play Waterfall Video: (own short video of First Falls, Morialta)

I stood there for a while, taking in the sight...

watching the volume of water gushing over the top

feeling the spray and the wind - that micro climate formed in the valley

it was exhilarating, refreshing, a true blessing

It Reminded me of the amazing grace and love and blessing of God - pouring out over me
streams of abundance

So much that my mind cannot contain it

The word Bless or Blessed or Blessing appear many times in the Bible.

It can mean:

- Praise, adulation, - the word we would use when praising God. Blessed be your name....
- It can also mean to speak well of – to praise someone... they are such a blessing
- Or, to be happy, to have received God's favour or blessings. I feel blessed
- Or, to bless someone, is to confer a benefit on them.. let's bless them with a meal..

Bless, as I said, is our word for the day. It is one of the seven Bee's I have been talking about.

They're all up in the foyer:

Beloved, Be, Believe, Belong, Befriend, Become, Bless

They're at the heart of our understanding of mission and ministry here at Athelstone Uniting.

I have been using my last opportunities to preach here to make sure you hear this encouragement about your strengths as a congregation and what I feel God is calling you to become..

So Bless is all about how...

- we share God's unconditional (agape) love by blessing others as we too have been blessed.
- We do this through acts of kindness, generosity, practical care, empathetic listening
- and working for the common good in our local community and beyond.

Blessed Bee ...

We've been playing with the image of a Bee –help you remember these Bee words – and, as one of the saints, John Chrysostom is believed to have said:

The bee is more honoured than other animals not because she labours, but because she labours for others.

The bee is a blessing to other bees and to us, as she spreads pollen, vital for plants that bear fruit.

In John 10:10 Jesus said, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly". Bees are a part of that abundant life that God, our loving Creator gives us – they are essential to flowers, honey, wine, wheat, fruit and all those signs of the abundance of life with which God has blessed us.

This abundance is so vast, so amazing, so beyond our comprehension!

Let's take a look at a clip from a movie that might give you a glimpse of the vastness of the scope of God's blessings....

Play cosmic eye video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Are9dDbW24>

How amazing was that?

Now, if we were to zoom right out and try to fit the whole Big Story of God into our view, we would be able to see all those times, all those places, all those circumstances when God has blessed:

Beginning with Creation itself – as we saw so spectacularly portrayed in that short movie..

The wonders of the universe

The beauty and complexity of our planet Earth – the oceans, skies, lands, rock formations, ecosystems, and that is alive – plants, insects, bacteria, fungi, creatures of the land, sea and sky, and humanity – the wonders of the human body

All is blessing. All is grace.

Zoom in a little closer and we might be able to view how God has blessed the first peoples of the many lands across our world – each with stories to share about how they have received blessing from Creator God – revealed in this land through law, custom and ceremony.

Zoom in closer again and we might be able to view the story of God's people as recorded in the Bible. So many stories of people who have experienced God's rich blessings, revealed through Creation, through Covenant, Law, Prophets, Priests and Kings, and in the fullness of time, revealed in Jesus – the ultimate blessing. The blessings continued in the coming of the Spirit who continues to bless us with gifts so that we can continue the story and bless others, in Jesus' name.

Zoom in closer again and we might be able to view the story of the Christian faith, of faithful people who have shared how God has blessed them, of Jesus followers who have served the poor and the downhearted, of passionate disciples who have spoken out for peace and justice. We might be able to view the story of those who felt lead to draw people together to form a church which would be open to change and renewal, always listening for the leading of the Spirit, the Uniting Church.

Zoom in closer again and we might be able to view the story of those who have blessed us personally through this congregation, through our families, through special events and camps, through inspiring teachers and caring leaders, through friends who drop off meals, or call to check we're ok.

Pan across and you might be able to see how we have been blessed by those who may not identify with terms like 'Christian', yet have blessed us in so many ways...

- Rami at Settebello
- Mohammed and Shirin at Indigo Espresso
- Marc and Ingrid O'Conaill from Campbelltown Landcare who generously give us plants for the wirra.
- Campbelltown council as they provide us with grants and support and partner with us on projects

These are the people who offer us the cup of cold water that Jesus speaks of. ..Who welcome us through generous hospitality and kindness.

These are the times when we receive blessings

Our God, is creator and sustainer of life. God's majesty and power, God's continued blessings, and God's great goodness fill us with wonder. It is the reason we sing Blessed be your name!

There are so many blessings I have experienced in my 5 years and 9 months serving you here at Athelstone: Some of them you may have already read about in my Appreciation Posts on Facebook this week:

- I am so thankful for the welcome I have received here, formally and informally, through Uncle Ivan Tiwu Copley OAM. A generous and gracious Kaurna / Peramangk elder who has shared many stories and taught me much about this beautiful land.
- The beauty of the area. Morialta and the abundance of water, the birds and koalas
- I've mentioned the local businesses, especially the cafes!
- Campbelltown Council – the elected members and the wonderful staff – and all they do for the common good in our community
- My ministry colleagues in neighbouring Uniting Churches and our ecumenical friends through Rostrevor Baptist, Glynde Lutheran and North East Salvos.

And of course, you, the Athelstone congregation have blessed me:

- The way so many of you have trusted me with your story. It is an honour and privilege – a blessing to be able to walk with you in your good times and some of the hardest days of your lives as individuals and as a community.
- Just as you have done for me... I experienced some really difficult times in my personal life in the last few years and you have loved and cared for me, and given me space to mourn and heal.

All blessings – blessings in abundance.

The reality is that even though we are blessed, and we experience God's blessings, we don't always feel blessed.

Illness, pain, loss of memory, financial hardship, loss of loved ones, isolation... there are so many things that can make us feel less-than-blessed. It is in these times that we are called to remember and to be encouraged. In a way we are blessed because we have a God who can take our complaints and laments – who has compassion for us. So, even in the midst of all the struggles, we are blessed, because we are not alone, we are blessed because we have a God who we can cry out to and who listens. We are blessed because we are part of a community that is there for us.

At Athelstone, we share God's abundant love by blessing others through acts of kindness, generosity, practical care, empathetic listening and working for the common good in our local community and beyond.

Thank you for joining me each year in blessing our community with the knitted angels at Christmas time. A random act of kindness with no strings attached is a great way to show the love of Jesus to those around us. It's always good to remember that small things done with great love can change the world.

Thank you for your generosity in giving to uniting communities, unitingworld, frontier services, tear fund, local schools ministry, and all you do for packing day and Christmas shoeboxes.

Thank you for the practical care you show one another as well as those we connect with in the community.

Thank you for spaces where community can gather and be blessed: the Wirra, the community garden, the peace garden.

Thank you for all you do for the *common good* in our local community and beyond.

My view of mission has always been greatly influenced by Jeremiah 29:7 – blessing and seeking the common good for our local community

As we heard earlier: *seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper*

Or as Eugene Peterson puts it in The Message paraphrase:

"Make yourselves at home there and work for the country's welfare. "Pray for Babylon's well-being. If things go well for Babylon, things will go well for you."

What do I mean by the term *common good*?

It's working together to improve the wellbeing of people in our society and the wider world.

I am inspired by the work of the Common Grace movement. They say:

We are animated by a vision of the good that God intends for the world and we are committed to pursuing love, beauty and grace to help this be realised today. God created this world, a common home, for all people and creation to flourish. A home where goodness

and love and grace prevail..... For true justice to prevail, where all of creation can enjoy the goodness that God intends, we need people to come together in common grace. We need to pursue Jesus and justice.

We're not exiles in Babylon... Our church is placed in the city of Campbelltown. From the time I was called here, I heard your passion and commitment to your local community ... our local community..... so many of you are part of service clubs and sporting groups:

Rotary, Lions, Scouts, Inner Wheel, Backpacks for Kids, volunteering up on Black Hill and Morialta, golf, bowls, ... and we have recognised together the joy there is in supporting local businesses, especially the cafes – and building community there!

Thank you for being a blessing to this local community!

I hope and pray that you can see what you do as a way of passing on the blessings you have received from God to others, as acts of grace and kindness, for the common good.

So, in closing, and to summarise all our Bee words:

May God Bless you

May you come to Believe that you are Beloved

May you feel that sense of Belonging to the community of God

May you continue on your own journey of Becoming all that you were made to be

May you continue to Befriend others

and in genuine relationship, demonstrate God's love and compassion

May you Bless others as you are Blessed.

May you take the time to Be in the presence of the One who is Love and is the bringer of peace.

Amen